

"ANGELINA'S FAINTED!"

THE talk was of Hottentots—

"Don't speak of 'em," cried Miss Angelina Daffy. "I'm certain of it—if I were only to look at a Hottentot, I should faint—I must faint."

"Fiddledee," said Miss Lillywhite; and there was a hush—a pause in the conversation; for when Miss Lillywhite exclaimed "Fiddledee," it behoved thoughtless young ladies to look to themselves. Now, Miss Daffy had a great talent for fainting. Perhaps the talent was originally a natural gift; nevertheless, it could not be denied, that a frequent and earnest cultivation of the endowment had brought it to perfection. Miss Daffy, at one minute's notice, could faint at any time, and upon any subject. She could faint at either extreme of the day—faint at breakfast, or faint at supper; could faint with equal beauty and truthfulness, whether the matter to be fainted upon were a black beetle, or a blackbird—a bull or a bullfinch. She had wonderful powers of syncope; though, it must be allowed, like most folks haunted with a despotic sense of their own genius, she now and then employed it a little out of place. Vanity, however, is a human weakness. For a philosopher, to his own satisfaction, has proved, that the peacock takes no pride in its own effulgent glories, but, all unconscious of their beauty, spreads them because it was ordained to do so; and after all, had Miss Daffy been philosophically examined upon her proneness to faint, she would have attributed the habit to no self-complacency, but to the simple but inevitable truth that she was made to faint. She would not have recognised any beauty in the art of fainting, but merely the natural consequence that to faint was feminine. Ewe, she thought, was made for *sal volatile*.

Miss Lillywhite was a spinster of seven-and-forty. "I am six—seven—eight-and-forty, next birth-day," Miss Lillywhite would blithely observe, as the year might be. And this gay veracity was the more pleasing in Miss Lillywhite, inasmuch as she might have passed for forty; nay, had she stickled ever so little for it, she might have got off with six-and-thirty at most—a happy, blooming six-and-thirty; for Miss Lillywhite, like a true Englishwoman, carried in her unfading beauty the assertion of her British race. How much triumphant beauty all over the world fades and yields, as teens blow into twenties, as twenties wrinkle into thirties! Now, your truly beautiful Englishwoman, with her carnations and lilies, will carry her colours up to two-score-and-ten. Nay, we have known some veterans, blooming with a sprinkling of years over tyrannous fifty. And Miss Lillywhite was as jocund as she was handsome. It is said, there is no better preservative against the melancholy changes wrought by time than honey. We know not whether Miss Lillywhite was acquainted with the Egyptian truth: if not, she had unconsciously acted upon the unknown recipe, and had preserved herself in the sweetness of her disposition—in the honey of her goodness. She was a pattern old maid. Yet a pattern, we would hope, never to be followed; for it is such women who make the real wives and mothers. Miss Lillywhite, like Miss Venus de Medicis, should remain a single perfection: alone in sweetness and beauty, to show what celibacy and art can do; to be admired as samples, but never to be added to.

Miss Lillywhite was an old schoolfellow of Mrs. Daffy's, and was passing the Christmas-time with her early friend and family. Now Angelina Daffy—a pretty creature, with more goodness in her than she dreamt of—had, as we have indicated, this weakness; she must faint: and carrying out this will, as a first principle, she had duly fainted through the whole round of the holidays. She had fainted at snap-dragons on Christmas-eve—fainted, very emphatically fainted, when surprised under the mistletoe on Christmas-day—fainted when the bells rang

in 1850—and fainted, dead as a stone, as a nervous guest declared, when prevailed upon to crack a *bon-bon* on Twelfth-night. "Angelina's fainted!" had become household words in the homestead of the Daffys.

And so, can it be wondered at that the ingenuous Miss Lillywhite, at this last threat of Angelina's, to faint at a Hottentot—should rebuke the maiden with more than ordinary vivacity? The truth is, Miss Lillywhite had been much provoked: even on the previous Sunday, when Angelina had menaced to faint at the clergyman—a very handsome, meek young man, who preached a maiden sermon with great promise of preferment—Miss Lillywhite could only scold the maiden into firmness, by threatening to give her up, unattended, to the care of the beadle. Therefore, when Angelina, returning to her weakness, expressed herself ready to go off at the very look of a Hottentot—therefore, all previous provocation considered, can it be wondered at that the patience of Miss Lillywhite fairly exploded with—"Fiddledee?" We think not; and take up the stitch of our little story.

"Fiddledee," said Miss Lillywhite.

Miss Angelina looked surprised—amazed—and gradually became very deeply wounded. At first, she raised her eyes towards Miss Lillywhite as though doubtful of the truth of her impressions: but the set, stern features of Miss Lillywhite—if you can couple the expression of sternness with the thought of a clear, bright open face, bright and clear as Dresden china—convinced Angelina that it was the lady visitor who had really spoken. What, under the new and painful circumstance, could Angelina do? Why, she fell back upon the strength of her weakness: she instantly made an ostentatious preparation to faint. Her eyelids were slightly tremulous—she swallowed one sob—her neck took one swan-like curve, and—and, in another second, there would have been the old, old cry of the house of Daffy—"Angelina's fainted!"

But—

Miss Lillywhite jumped from her chair, and resolutely passing Mrs. Daffy, made direct to the sufferer, who, half conscious of the attempted rescue, was fainting all the faster. "Angelina," cried Miss Lillywhite, with a restorative shake, "this is affectation—folly—hypocrisy—nonsense!"

Miss Angelina Daffy opened her orbs; and in a moment sat upright, with her prettily cut nostril dilated, and the tear that was coming into her astonished eyes almost frozen, and indeed, altogether, in such a state of amazement that she must—no, she would not faint; it was not a time to faint, when so cruelly offended.

Miss Lillywhite drew her chair beside Angelina, who was every moment hardening in dignity. "My dear child," said Miss Lillywhite, "you must give up fainting—it's gone out of fashion."

"Fashion, Miss Lillywhite! Do you think that feelings—"

"Fiddledee," again repeated Miss Lillywhite; and Angelina sternly resolved not to say another word to so strange a person—to so unpolite a visitor. Angelina crossed her arms in resignation, determining—since her mamma would not interfere—to suffer in silence. Miss Lillywhite might be rude—might say her worst.

"When I was eighteen, your age," said Miss Lillywhite, "and that, my dear, is nearly thirty years ago, I used to faint, too. I enjoyed fainting very much; indeed, my dear, I question if ever you take greater pleasure in fainting than I did."

"Pleasure!" exclaimed Miss Angelina. Who could remain dumb under such an imputation?

"Oh, I know all about it—pleasure, my dear," said the remorseless Miss Lillywhite. "You see, it gave me a little consequence; it drew upon me general notice; it made me, as it were, the centre of a picture; and it was a pleasure—not a healthful one, certainly, but still a pleasure—to enjoy so much sympathy about one. To hear, whilst I was in the fit—I don't know, my dear, whether you hear, when fainting, quite as well as I did—to hear

expressions of concern, and pity, and admiration, and—do you hear them, distinctly?" Angelina could not answer such a question: she could only look lightning—harmless, summer-lightning—at Miss Lillywhite, who inexorably continued. "I can confess it now—I used to enjoy the excitement, and therefore went off upon every reasonable opportunity. It was very wrong, but there *was* something pleasant, exciting in the words 'Miss Lillywhite's fainted!' Oh, I can remember them, my dear, as though it was only yesterday. But, my love," said the cruel spinster, taking the young maid's hand between her own, and looking so benignly, and speaking so sweetly—"but, my love, we may faint once too often."

Angelina was very much offended—deeply hurt that Miss Lillywhite should for a moment associate her own past affection with the real existing weakness then and there before her. Nevertheless, there was such quietness, such truthfulness, and withal such an air of whim in the looks, and words, and manner of the elderly spinster, that the young one gradually resigned herself to her monitress.

"We may faint once too often," repeated Miss Lillywhite, and she sighed; and then her customary smile beamed about her. "Of this dreary truth am I a sad example."

"You! Miss Lillywhite!" said Angelina.

"Listen," said the old maid. "'Tis a short story; but worth your hearing. When I was nineteen, I was about to be married. About, did I say? Why, the day was fixed; I was in my bridal dress; at the altar; the ring, the wedding-ring at the very tip of my finger, when—"

"Mercy me!" cried Angelina, "what happened?"

"I fainted," said Miss Lillywhite, and she shook her head, and a wan smile played about her lips.

"And you were not married, because you fainted?"

said Angelina, much awakened to the subject.

"As I have confessed, it was my weakness to faint upon all occasions. I enjoyed the interest that, as I thought, fainting cast about me. My lover often looked coldly—suspiciously; but love conquered his doubts, and led him triumphantly before the parson. Well the marriage-service was begun, and"—

"Do go on," cried Angelina.

"And in a few minutes I should have been a wife, when I thought I must faint. It would seem very bold of me in such a situation not to faint. I, who had fainted on so many occasions, not to swoon at the altar would have been a want of sentiment—of proper feeling, on so awful an occasion. With this thought, I felt myself fainting rapidly; and just as the bridegroom had touched my finger with the ring,—I went off; yes, my dear, swooned with all the honours."

"Do go on," again cried Angelina.

"As I swooned, the ring slipped from the bridegroom's fingers, fell upon the stove, and was rolling—rolling—to drop through the aperture of the stove that, from below, admitted heat to the church, when—though swooning—I somehow saw the danger, and, to stop the ring, put forth my foot!"

"Well!" exclaimed Angelina.

"Too late—the ring rolled on—disappeared down the chimney of the stove,—and then I fainted with the greatest fidelity. Hartshorn and *sal volatile* came to my aid. I was restored—but where was the ring? 'Twas hopeless to seek for it. Half-a-dozen other rings were proffered; but no—it would be an evil omen—there would be no happiness, if I were not wedded with my own ring. Well, search was made—and time flew—and, we were late at church to begin with—and the ring was not found when the church-clock struck twelve."

"Well!" said Angelina.

"Well!" sighed Mrs. Lillywhite, "The clergyman, closing his book, said, 'It is past the canonical hour; the parties cannot be married to-day; they must come again to-morrow.'"

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Angelina.

"We returned home; my lover upbraided—I retorted;

we had a shocking quarrel, and—and he left the house to write me a farewell letter. In a week he was on his voyage to India; in a twelvemonth he had married an Indian lady, as rich as an idol, and I—after thirty years—am still Caroline Lillywhite, spinster."

It is very strange. From the time of the above narrative there were two words never again breathed beneath the roof-tree of the Daffys. And these unuttered words were—

"Angelina's fainted!"

RED RIDING HOOD.

Letters on Physical Geography.

By PROFESSOR ANSTED.

MY DEAR MRS. LONDON,—Most people are aware that amongst the materials of which limestone and other rocks are made up, there are included a multitude of shells and other remains of animals which it is only reasonable to suppose were once living in the sea and became buried in mud, and afterwards turned into stone. A glance at the marble slabs from Derbyshire or Devonshire will satisfy any one that a large part of the substance of such material is due to the organic world; but there are some curious facts bearing upon the accumulation of such fragments which the study of existing nature very beautifully illustrates. I have thought that a statement concerning these might prove interesting to your readers.

A very eminent and careful German naturalist, M. Ehrenberg, has laid open to us the existence of a world of minute animals, invisible to the unassisted eye, but producing, beyond a doubt, the most important and even sometimes the most gigantic results. These little creatures, sometimes called *animalcules* from the smallness of their dimensions, are so very small that hundreds might, if so inclined, and without any inconvenience from crowding, dance and hold their Christmas revels on the head of a pin; a small bead would be to them a world, and a drop of water a vast ocean. But little as the space may be which they require, their territory extends over the broad seas from the Arctic to the Antarctic Pole, and they range throughout the belt of water that reaches from Europe to America, and from the Indian ocean to the eastern verge of the Pacific. Thousands occupy a single pint of water, and the imagination shrinks from calculating the number of those myriads who make up the inhabitants of our globe.

That such creatures play an important part in creation no one familiar with the general appearance of nature will, for a moment, doubt; and one of our most distinguished fellow-countrymen, Professor Owen, has very happily suggested that they catch the last fragments of decomposing animal and vegetable matter before these vanish into thin air, and thus bring back to the realms of life that which has already served to support vitality, and which was on the point of falling back into the mineral kingdom. Thus the mysterious circle of existence appears to be kept up in its complete and perfect form, and the great Author of nature, ever careful to prevent the unnecessary extinction of his highest work on earth,—that of organisation,—has created whole races on the extreme confines of the vast kingdom of animated beings to receive and collect and re-prepare for higher purposes the decaying particles of other beings.

Like a very large proportion of animals the animalcules possess and exert the power of separating from the water a certain quantity of stony matter which it always contains. With this they make for themselves solid and very often flinty cases of infinite minuteness and perfectly transparent, but often delicately marked and peculiar to the race. Some live in the open sea, others near shore, others again in fresh-water, and many in moist earth; and the cases or skeletons which they construct remain